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SENSITIVE

WHITE HOUSE PASS TO USTR

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TAGS: [ECON](#) [ETRD](#) [OVIP](#) [NI](#) [WTO](#)

SUBJECT: U.S. MOVE TOWARD AFRICAN WTO POSITIONS APPLAUDED
AT OAU TRADE MINISTERIAL

REF: A) STATE 160506 B) STATE 161354

Sensitive But Unclassified, Please Handle Accordingly.

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Fourth Organization of African Unity/African Economic Community Conference of Trade Ministers September 22-23 in Abuja, Nigeria ended with widespread appreciation for U.S. movement toward African WTO positions on agriculture, intellectual property, the environment, labor issues, and special and differential treatment (as outlined in reftel A). While the conference could not issue a final report (as much for logistical reasons as substantive ones), all countries -- even those which have traditionally opposed the U.S. at the WTO -- recognized how far the U.S. has come and that there now exists a firm basis to bridge the remaining differences and launch a new round. On the bilateral U.S.-Nigeria front, AUSTR Whitaker met with National Assembly members on the WTO, received support from the Vice President and Minister of Commerce for a new WTO round, and got new promises that bureaucratic problems that have to date prevented an AGOA-compatible visa system for apparel exports would soon be resolved. END SUMMARY.

At the OAU Ministerial Conference

[1](#)2. (U) Working through OAU Economic Office Director Fred Alipui, Post assisted Ms. Whitaker in scheduling her remarks during the trade ministerial opening plenary session (immediately prior to those by Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo) and in distributing extensive USG WTO talking points in English and French to all delegations.

[1](#)3. (U) Mike Moore, Director General of the World Trade Organization, gave a ten-minute presentation in which he challenged the African nations to become more involved in the global trading system and promised that, under his administration, Africa would be a primary focus of WTO activities. Likewise, AUSTR Whitaker,s remarks encouraged African nations, as a substantial voting block, to take a leadership role in setting the WTO agenda. She also outlined U.S. movement toward African positions on WTO issues. Whitaker reviewed tangible results of the first year since passage of the African Growth and Opportunity Act. Contacts at the OAU and several delegates favorably contrasted the prominent placement of AUSTR Whitaker,s remarks in the opening ceremony and the extensive dissemination of the U.S. position papers with the rather pro forma participation by the European Union. The EU was represented by their Abuja-resident Ambassador who read two pages of talking points during a lightly-attended afternoon session.

[1](#)4. (U) At the margins of the two-day ministerial, Ms. Whitaker and Mr. Moore held consultations with Trade Ministers and their delegations from Uganda, Kenya, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Senegal, Gabon, Benin, Botswana, Angola, Guinea Conakry, and South Africa.

[1](#)5. (SBU) The Ugandan Trade Minister told AUSTR Whitaker that President Museveni is recalling his Ambassador from Geneva and replacing him with one who will reflect shared African and U.S. objectives in the WTO. Nigerian Trade Minister Mustapha Bello, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Executive Secretary Lansana Kouyate, and Assistant Secretary General of the OAU Ambassador Lawrence O.C. Agubuzu

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all commented on the growing support within the OAU and ECOWAS for a new round, and voiced appreciation to Whitaker for the changes in the USG position.

16. (SBU) Nigerian logistical support, notably translation and interpretation services, was poor and impacted the progress of events. The early departure of Trade Ministers who would not delegate authority to subordinates and a few hardline hold outs on the issue of "consensus" for a new round, meant that the final report was tabled until a special OAU Trade Ministers, caucus to be held before Doha.

Business Outside the Ministerial Conference

17. (SBU) First in a meeting with National Assembly Speaker Ghali Na,abba and later in a lunch with the Chairs of the House and Senate Commerce Committees, Whitaker encouraged the Nigerian National Assembly to play a more proactive role in setting the nation's trade policy agenda within both the WTO and on AGOA. Whitaker showed the Chairmen Nigerian press reports that members of the National Assembly were advocating Nigeria's withdrawal from the WTO. The legislators seemed surprised by the tone of the press reports, claiming that they had not, in fact, advocated such a position. The Chairman did, however, express concern over Nigeria's obligations in the WTO. Whitaker replied that African nations, as a significant voting block within the WTO, stood to gain from a new round at which Africans could voice their concerns and play a leadership role in setting the agenda.

18. (SBU) In a separate meeting, ECOWAS Executive Secretary Kouyate said that all, even the most recalcitrant ECOWAS states, now see globalization as inevitable. Kouyate had just returned from Botswana where he obtained USD 2 million for training of ECOWAS member state officials in trade issues, and was applying for further support from other organizations including the regional USAID office in Bamako. Though Kouyate only has three months left in his tenure, he expected to leave ECOWAS with his program well established. Each of the fifteen member states will specialize in some area of trade in goods and services, and will be able to represent the sub-region in a professional manner that was not possible before.

Vice President and Commerce Minister Address WTO and AGOA

19. (SBU) AUSTR Whitaker, Moore and Poloff made a series of calls on high-level Nigerian officials, including Vice President Atiku Abubakar and Minister of Commerce Mustapha Bello. Abubakar received with grace AUSTR Whitaker,s thank you for Nigerian leadership in calling for a new WTO round, but seemed more interested in AGOA issues. He agreed to intervene as necessary in resolving problems with Nigerian Customs in ensuring inspections by U.S. customs officers to prevent transshipment as part of the apparel visa program. He also asked if the U.S. could involve more states in the gum arabic program. (President Obasanjo had also asked to ensure that Yobe State would be made a full participant.) Whitaker explained that the U.S. private sector, working with USAID, had chosen Jigawa State as a pilot project where U.S. contractors would work with the State government on establishing a quality-control laboratory that would meet U.S. import requirements. She emphasized that the laboratory would be able to evaluate gum arabic originating anywhere in Nigeria, cautioning against other states setting up laboratories that might not meet U.S. standards. Whitaker predicted that efforts to diversify gum arabic supplies away from Sudan would increase, and that U.S. demand would be high enough to support gum arabic growers in many Nigerian States.

110. (SBU) Minister of Commerce Mustapha Bello, host of the OAU Ministerial, was pleased to hear that an earlier proposal to sell Nigerian yarn to South Africa for apparel production would be allowed under AGOA, and would require only a certificate of origin. Bello also brought up demands from Nigerian States, particularly Yobe, for greater participation in the gum arabic project. Bello believed that the majority of African states were behind a new round, but that the few hardliners might preclude the consensus normally required for the OAU to take a position. Both in the private meeting and in the press opportunity that followed, Bello complimented USTR Zoellick for his leadership in moving U.S. WTO positions and expressed an interest in meeting the new USTR.

111. (U) Press coverage of the visit was extensive and

included the speech at the plenary session, calls on the Speaker of the House and Minister of Commerce and the departure press conference attended by 22 journalists at the Lagos international airport on May 25. Coverage will be reported septel as a part of PAS regular placement reports.

112. (U) AUSTR Whitaker did not have an opportunity to clear this message before departing Nigeria.
Andrews